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ABSTRACT

Many universities and colleges have initiated faculty improvement programs which are directed at keeping the faculty intellectually rigorous, at encouraging the academic growth of individual professors, and at helping experienced teachers make adaptations to changes in student populations and institutional reorganization. This paper describes the forms that many of these improvement programs have taken and delineates some of the problems that have encountered. Among the types of programs currently being implemented are opportunities for instructional improvement, grants for teaching improvement, opportunities for interdepartmental mobility, and opportunities for developing pedagogical colleagueship. Some of the possibilities inovlved in each program are outlined. (TO)

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Critical Issues In Faculty Development

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It was not too many years ago that university faculties were enjoying a period of tremendous academic mobility. Department budgets were growing and students were flocking to university campuses by the thousands. Individual professors in those days had little reason to concern themselves about improving their teaching, research, or writing skills. Positions were plentiful and the ambitious or dissatisfied could easily seek a plump job offer someplace else rather than stay and work to improve their own departments. But that sense of mobility has now faded. Economic recession and declining enrollments have put great pressures on new faculty, who must overcome overwhelming odds to secure a position, and on tenured professors who feel less able than before to develop their careers by moving to another university. Similarly, cutbacks have made it difficult for departments to revitalize themselves or raise their prestige by recruiting new staff or by expanding stagnated programs. In short, department faculties are presently faced with the prospect of growing old together, unable either to add new blood or, individually, to find new opportunities for growth.

Limited financial resources have created other problems for faculty as well. Increases in tuition and operating costs have caused students, trustees, and state legislatures to hold universities much more accountable for what they do. Students paying high tuitions demand quality teaching and trustees paying high costs want increased prestige generated through research and publication.

Faced with these problems, many forward-looking universities and colleges have initiated elaborate improvement programs which are directed at keeping faculty intellectually rigorous, at encouraging the academic growth of individual professors, and at helping experienced teachers make adaptations to changes in student populations and institutional reorganization. Many of these programs have enjoyed great success but not without a certain amount of frustration and resistance. The following is a description of the forms that many of these improvement programs have taken and a delineation of some of the problems they have encountered.

The first problem facing any institution undertaking the development of its faculty is to decide where the main thrust of that development will be and how it will be carried out. Post-secondary education includes a wide variety of institutions, each with a slightly different function. Major universities place great emphasis on research. State institutions are particularly sensitive to their public service function, and community colleges have devoted much of their attention to developing appropriate responses to the needs of open access and community interests. Each institution, therefore, must design a development program that best fits its individual needs. The following represent the types of programs currently being implemented:

1. Opportunities for Instructional Improvement. The most recent, and probably the most innovative, form of faculty development is the campus center for improving teaching. The primary function of such a center is to conduct programs of assisted self-study which

encourage faculty to discover one another's strengths, clarify their goals, and approach their work in a new spirit. Specific programs on teaching improvement conducted at these centers vary but generally include:

(1) Regular, detailed observations of and about teaching by colleagues, visitors, specialists and students.

(2) Widespread sharing of knowledge about learning as an activity, based on the experience of faculty and students, the expertise of researchers, and autobiographical accounts of successful learning and teaching.

(3) Programs of systematic training of graduate students, as part of their normal program, in skills useful to a future professor.

(4) "How to" seminars directed at helping those who are interested in developing or improving their research and writing skills.

(5) Development of procedures for diagnosing individual teaching problems and prescribing ways of self-improvement.

(6) Coordination of interdepartment cooperation on teaching and research efforts.*

Two years ago, approximately fifteen centers existed; today over eighty have been established on campuses across the United States. Some of these centers have been established through grants from foundations or endowments. Others, especially those

*Excerpted from Faculty Development in a Time of Retrenchment, Group for Human Development in Higher Education, 1974.

at state institutions, have been set up by state and/or administrative officials in response to increased demands for better teaching. For whatever the reason, the establishment of campus centers acknowledges the fact that modes of teaching and learning institutionalized in a previous era are no longer automatically appropriate for the increasingly diverse populations of learners served by all community colleges and by most state colleges and universities. Therefore, it has become increasingly more important to revitalize teachers who have grown bored with the same course taught too many times, to broaden the vision of the narrow specialist, and to help the enthusiastic and skillful scholar-researcher become an equally enthusiastic and skillful teacher.

The success of a campus program on teaching improvement rests largely on the way in which it is presented to the faculty. In those instances where centers have been established by administrative fiat, faculties have resisted them, viewing their efforts as a threat to academic freedom or as rigid evaluation systems on which tenure and promotion decisions would be heavily weighed. In cases where faculty development efforts have grown from within the faculty themselves, however, programs have gained a wider acceptance. Initiative shown by groups such as the faculty senate or academic council emphasize the feeling of self-awareness and self-study that centers must promote if they are going to have an impact on their intended audiences. It is important to point out that if faculty development is to be carried out, it will be more successful if the faculty themselves decide about the ways

in which their improvement will be conducted.

2. Grants for Teaching Improvement. Campus programs on teaching can be extremely effective for generating new enthusiasm for teaching, but inventive professors infected by that enthusiasm need access to resources to help them prepare, conduct and evaluate innovative approaches to instruction. These resources are being provided on many campuses to individuals who submit proposals for small grants on a competitive basis. These grants are then awarded for the purpose of experimenting with a particular teaching procedure or for experimental research which could be instructive if it involves student assistants or simply has the effect of generating support for a publication or paper. In either case, the probability that students, professors, or the university at large might benefit is great.

As in the case of the campus center, however, certain problems can be anticipated with this approach to faculty development. To begin with, these grants would not necessarily lead to cooperation on campus but could rather cause some jealousies and suspicions. Grant money often comes in a purse with very long strings attached. These strings, when pulled, understandably require some proof that the grant had accomplished something. To get such proof, a whole new variety of tests or accountability systems have to be devised and administered fairly. For some, this represents an additional infringement on academic freedom and causes some conflicts among faculty competing for limited funds. One possible solution to this problem is the use of the

departmental prize which is awarded to a deserving colleague by the majority vote of his peers. This reduces professional jealousy somewhat and removes the accountability factor almost entirely.

It is fair to conclude that a college or university is not making the best use of its budget unless it reserves at least a small percentage for some form of faculty development grant. Ideally, the awarding of the grants would be coordinated with the work of the campus center and would be administered by an advisory panel of faculty whose membership would rotate periodically.

3. Opportunities for Interdepartmental Mobility. It is a sad fact of academic life that universities are subdivided into departments within schools or colleges. Each man has his "field" and he must not trespass into a neighboring discipline. Unfortunately, the interests and talents of many professors go beyond their departmental boundries. English teachers, for example, very often have interests in areas related to literature: history, sociology, anthropology, education, art, and music; all fall under the rubric of "humanities." How many of us here today divide our time between education and English departments? By the same token, science and math departments often have individuals qualified in statistics, psychology, computer science and many more areas. When professors are provided with opportunities to explore these interests through interdepartment projects or transfers, the result is often positive.

Interdepartment mobility can take many forms. Cooperative research projects, a new perspective brought to a course by a colleague from another department, team teaching, or faculty generally organized around colleague groups based on shared interests in certain problems, methodologies, or philosophical approaches are just a few examples of opportunities for multiple identifications. Whatever the arrangement, however, interdepartment mobility can have the effect of revitalizing interest in teaching, of broadening the vision of the narrow specialist, and of very often helping members of one department discover the talents of colleagues in another.

While this approach to faculty development seems like the easiest to implement, it is in many ways the most difficult. Problems created by departmental politics, evaluation for tenure and promotion decisions, cross-charging of department budgets and a host of other concerns form a series of hurdles yet to be overcome. But the fact remains that if arrangements were available through which faculty members could rekindle their interests, find new colleagues, explore new questions, and teach in new settings, then faculty might apply some of the immense energy now absorbed by academic gamesmanship to opportunities for their own development. Such internal career opportunities might also reduce the problem of "dead wood" now so frustrating not only to the departments involved but also to the professors who find no time to grow.

4. Related Concerns. Many of the programs mentioned above are directed largely at improving teaching through increased

cooperation between faculty members. As department members, researchers, and committee members, faculty enjoy various forms of colleagueship, but as teachers they generally work alone. A program for faculty development, however, begins with the recognition that the quality of teaching depends not only on scholarship but on pedagogical colleagueship.

To be sure, individual professors could make certain improvements on their own by reading about education and student development, by experimenting in their own courses, and by observing the results systematically. Institutions could encourage some improvement simply by starting to give greater weight to student evaluations of teaching in decisions that affect professors' careers. However, colleges and universities should develop separate systems for mutual observation of classes by colleagues and other suitable people. Visitors can come from the teacher's own department, other departments at the same insitution, and from departments in the same field at neighboring institutions.

Once an institution accepts the value of alternatives to teaching solitude, it faces the question of how to support a program of faculty development. In the years of easy expansion, colleges and universities came to assume that starting a new program would generally require a grant. In the case of faculty development, however, the main requirement is not cash but a fraction of the professors' time.

Reformers have often assumed an automatic resistance on the part of faculty and academic departments to serious programs to

improve teaching. However, part of this resistance has sprung not from an unwillingness to make the necessary effort but from a lack of knowledge about how to improve and a sense that such knowledge was not really available. A recent survey found that, even at a major research university, nearly half of the faculty was willing to engage in a formal training program to improve the quality of their work with students. Presumably the percentage is even higher at colleges that impose less severe demands for publication.

No program will thrive unless faculty find a place for it within their normal working hours. Therefore, a program of faculty development should begin by helping professors analyze how they use their time so they can reallocate about ten percent of it to work in the program. This might amount to four, five perhaps six hours a week. Teachers know how much time they spend in class, but few can accurately say how much they spend, in a typical week, on preparing for class, dealing with papers and exams, meeting with individual students or committees, talking with colleagues, responding to questionnaires or requests for recommendations, doing various kinds of research or writing, and so forth. Occasionally, legislatures or administrators have required faculty to account for their time, and this can always plausibly be done - especially if the only purpose is to document the claim that professors spend a lot of time on the job and a reasonable fraction of it with, or on behalf of, students. What faculty should do now, however, is to analyze their use of time for their own benefit, making fresh judgments about what is most valuable.

Assuming that faculty can find the necessary time, how can the program come into being? It would not be unusual in the academic world for a committee to study all aspects of the proposal for a year or more and then put the question to the faculty for a vote. Even if the proposal were finally approved, its opponents might have fatally weakened it. If the program involved all faculty, it might then be sabotaged through passive resistance and self-defensive carping from within. If it were only for volunteers, it might nonetheless lose many potential volunteers by having become "controversial."

Fortunately, there are other ways to proceed. Organizers of a faculty development program might start with a small, well-sponsored, and carefully organized program designed for those professors who most want to take advantage of it. If the program required no more than a modest financial outlay, and if it were imposed on no one, its organizers should face a minimum of delaying tactics, raucous debate or demands for formal authorization. This would have several advantages. It would reduce polarization on the issues raised. It would make services immediately available. It would allow participants to help one another without being diverted by those untouched by the spirit of the enterprise. And the program could spread by the force of example.

One danger of starting only with volunteer faculty, however, is that they might include a high percentage of professors most disaffected from the institution. The program could thus become known as a haven for "misfits." Another danger is that if certain

professors were encouraged to take part, a rumor might start to the effect that the program existed to offer compensatory education to "incompetents." The organizers should therefore make a deliberate and concerted effort to recruit people highly respected in the institution as well as some of the best teachers on campus. Such professors should participate in the day-to-day affairs of the program, as well as serving as sponsors and advisors. The program should always include various degrees of competence, status, and conventionality.

Such a program need not be defined as "experimental," any more than it need become a "requirement." It can be open to everyone. As people come to appreciate its value, participating in it can be officially recognized as satisfying a fraction of a professor's teaching duties. Personnel committees can take account of contributions made to the program and evidence of teaching effectiveness shown within it. In general, faculty development efforts have great potential for improving the services provided by institutions of higher learning and for increasing the satisfaction faculties within those institutions can get from their work.